

1789
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The Faith and Profession of the Gospel.

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DISCOURSE

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APRIL 8, 1789.

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Pastor of the Church in Hanover.

Published at the Desire of the Hearers.

So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

And let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

St. PAUL:

B O S T O N :

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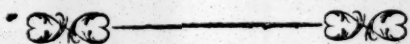
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DISCOURSE.



ROMANS x. 9, 10.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

VERY happy and comfortable indeed for a sinful, perishing world, is the doctrine of pardon, peace and salvation, revealed and published in the gospel of JESUS CHRIST. By faith in, and submission to whom, true penitents may hope to obtain forgiveness, and mortals immortality.

For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

Even that whosoever believeth in him, might not perish in death, the wages of sin, but have everlasting life.

Religion is more especially the work of the Heart, yet not so as to exclude the understanding and other powers of the mind, or faculties of the body, which have all their several parts assigned them in this great and important business.

Although with the Heart man believeth, yet with
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the *Mouth* he confesseth, or maketh profession of that faith. These two, you observe are joined together in the great affair of the sinner's salvation, and are not to be separated. "If thou shalt *confess with thy mouth* the Lord Jesus, and shall *believe in thine heart* that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

It is to be observed likewise, that *righteousness* and *salvation*, are ascribed in these words, to faith and confession, antecedent to a *course* of good works, and a life of virtue and future obedience.

Accordingly, in speaking to these words, the three following things, seem to be naturally and obviously required.

I. To shew that the faith of the gospel must be attended with the profession of it, in order to salvation.

II. That righteousness and salvation are immediately and inseparably connected with the faith and profession of the gospel. And then

IIIly. To urge and exhort you, *my hearers*, not only to *believe* on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but to *profess* his holy religion that you may be saved.

I. The faith of the gospel must be attended with the profession of it, in order to salvation. Such a union and connexion of these two several distinct things you observe in the text, and taken notice of, and required by the apostle who was commissioned and inspired to preach the gospel to the world, and well understood what were the indispensable requisites to salvation. In like manner our LORD JESUS CHRIST himself, the great Author and Founder of our holy religion, authorised and empowered

powered, from on high, to prescribe and appoint the terms and conditions of acceptance and salvation, and who has enjoined nothing that was unessential thereto, most pathetically and solemnly assures us, "That whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, who is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven;" and again, "Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God."*

But let it be observed, that such a faith in the christian revelation as has no influence upon the heart and moral character, and implies and carries in it no subjection and devotedness to the great and heavenly Author of it, is only a vain and futile thing; for *so* wicked men or even devils may believe the truth of the gospel. The nature of the case supposes that he who believes *in his heart*, and not merely in *his head*, that God raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, to be a Prince and a Savior, *now* takes him for his Lord and Legislator, his Master and Governor, and is not backward to own subjection, and pay him homage. For what loyal subject refuses to acknowledge allegiance to his rightful sovereign? Or what good and faithful servant will disown his master's power, and not profess subjection to his government?

The reason of the thing plainly requires that we own and confess the name and authority of that Lord and Savior in whom we believe, and see fit to place our trust and confidence. And we may well expect that our Lord will disown us if we are indifferent about

* Matth. x. 32, 33. Luke xii. 8, 9.

about the matter, and make no point of confessing him, or are afraid or ashamed to do it. Moreover, the duty and necessity of *confessing*, as well as believing, is learnt from *example* as well as precept. The eunuch not only believed, but professed his faith before Philip baptized him. See here is water, says the *Ethiopian*, what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, if thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Thus was his confession answerable to that in the text, a believing that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Short confessions of faith, but directly to the purpose, implying indeed every thing else that was necessary and essential.

Confessions of faith may contain *more* words or *less*, that indeed is a matter of indifference and governed by custom and the practice of churches and places. To be made in the language of the holy scriptures seems to be the safest, because they are the standing, invariable rule both of our faith and practice. Creeds of men, human composition are uncertain things, various, according to times and prevailing prejudices, and many or most of them, false or defective though supposed or pretended to be conformable and original standard of truth. But seeing lency and perfection depend upon their agreeableness to this perfect rule, this rule itself must be accounted preferable to any imperfect copies taken by fallible man.

The trembling jailor was required to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he might be saved. And therefore the apostles spake unto him the word of the Lord, to this end; and it must be supposed that he *openly* consented to it, or how could it appear that he

he believed as the apostles required, and so was a fit subject for baptism and admission into the kingdom of Christ? For an open, public profession of faith in Christ and his gospel, is indispensibly required of all adult persons, who are admitted to baptism and the communion of the church. Faith and profession, it is plain, must go together in order to attending in the church and kingdom of Christ, and enjoying the ordinances of the gospel, in this world.

By some means or other the person's faith must be publicly known. It is with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness. But of this men cannot judge, it lies open only to the eye of *omniscience*. It is the "Confession of the mouth, unto salvation," the church of Christ is principally concerned with, which is the only thing that comes under human cognizance and observation.

But this faith of the heart may be various ways manifested and made known; and is so in different places and churches—by verbal declaration—by consent to words or a form proposed—or by subscribing with the hand to the Lord, and signing a covenant or profession. And for my own part I heartily wish there was less formality and ceremony attending this matter than there commonly is in our dissenting churches. In order that serious, well-meaning people, after having conquered other prevailing scruples and prejudices, might meet with no embarrassments in their approaches to the table and ordinances of Christ, or any thing to retard them in a compliance with their duty, or keep them from it, as many are (though perhaps without sufficient reason) all the days of their lives.

One thing more I would just observe in this place,

in reference to *non-communicants*, who have been baptised, and made a profession of religion, that their faith or profession is the same as those that are actual communicants, and that they are exempted thereby, from no particular christian duty or ordinance, any more than others, however they may take the liberty, inconsistently to exempt themselves. Nevertheless I would not be understood to encourage the lewd and intemperate, the profane, the unrighteous, the habitually or openly vicious of any character, *continuing such*, to join any of Christ's churches, or mock him at his table; although they are baptised, or have with their mouth confessed the Lord Jesus. The exhortation to such is, not to renounce their baptism and profession, but to repent and reform immediately, to break off their sins by righteousness, and act consistently, and in character.

But to return to the subject. An open, public profession of the religion of Jesus Christ, and our faith in him, is a necessary and indispensable requisition in order to do honor to our Savior, and his divine institution—necessary to shew that we are not ashamed of him and his glorious cause, and that we are ready, if our faith and profession should call us to it, to suffer for his name, and the blessed, joyful hope he has set before us—a duty to be complied with, as an example to others, and a recommendation of his religion to a wicked, unbelieving world. And in a word to shew that we rejoice and glory in Christ Jesus, and even in his cross, and account it our greatest honor and happiness to be the servants of such a Master, the disciples and subjects of such a glorious Prince and Savior, now ascended up on high, the appointed Judge of quick and dead, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness

forgiveness of sins, and rejoice in hope of a glorious immortality in the heavens, when worldly scenes are passed away, and all these things shall be dissolved. Which brings us to say in the next place,

II. That righteousness and salvation are immediately and inseparably connected with the faith and profession of the gospel.

“ With the heart man believeth unto *righteousness*,” unto justification, pardon, peace and acceptance with God.” “ And with the mouth confession is made unto *salvation*,” salvation from wrath and condemnation, which implies and involves the idea of the aforementioned justification and reconciliation, in regard of that offended God, to whom we have made ourselves enemies in our minds by wicked works.

That this great blessing of pardon and peace with God, in respect of all such as believe and embrace the gospel, and accept the overtures of mercy contained therein, takes place *immediately*, and in the present time, is according to that public act of grace and indemnity published therein to the world, and is plain from the general spirit and strain of the evangelical dispensation itself. Indeed the very nature of the thing supposes it. We cannot conceive of a true penitent under the gospel, as remaining unpardoned and out of favor with God—or a true believer on Jesus Christ, as not justified and accepted in the sight of God, and having his salvation already begun. And on the other hand it is plain and certain that the impenitent and unbelieving are still under condemnation of law, and not being justified by faith, have no peace with God, or access into that grace wherein believers stand,

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and

and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

The gospel is addrest *especially* and *directly* only to those who are the subjects of it, and favored with its light and instruction. With regard to the ungospelised world, I will not undertake to say, positively and particularly, how God will deal with them, or how far they may be partakers of the grace and salvation of the gospel, without the knowledge of the christian revelation. This we know *in general*, that the gospel is tydings of great joy to all people, that it gives peace on earth and discovers good will to men—that it is of universal designation, calculated for the salvation of the whole world, Jews and Gentiles—not *confined* like some former dispensations, but a mystery of grace, to be made known among all nations, for the obedience of faith, and that too, according to the commandment of the everlasting God—that God who has set forth his own Son as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and has assured us, that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.

With regard to that part of redemption that relates to the resurrection of the dead, it is evidently *universal*, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” For the nations of the world to enjoy the hope of immortality, and the assurance of pardon upon repentance, must needs be very *comfortable*, at the same time that it is the powerful means of promoting their reformation and effecting their repentance. But who can say that mankind, destitute of these advantages, and ignorant of the benefits of redemption, must also, together with this, be *necessarily* excluded from all those blessings by Jesus Christ, which they have
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not the happiness of being informed of, by any direct revelation from heaven? The blessings of God's covenant and promises, we very well know, in many instances, extend to those, who never had the means of coming to the knowledge of them. For instance the covenant of the rainbow, the promise of seed time and harvest, &c.

But with reference to such as are blessed with the glorious gospel, it expressly assures us that "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." *Here* salvation by Jesus Christ, is again ascribed to faith only, without works or future obedience as the consequence of it. And so says St. Paul, "We conclude therefore that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."

So that there is a justification and salvation, that commences with believing and professing the gospel, prior to that virtue, and those works of righteousness that flow from it, and are the fruits of it. And accordingly we read of this justification and salvation, in the gospel, as a thing that has already taken place, in regard of believers, and is spoken of not in the future, but in the present and past tense. So Titus iii. 5. Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he *saved* us from our former state of impenitence and disobedience, and consequently of guilt and condemnation. And 2 Tim. i. 9. "Who *hath saved* us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace." Rom. iii. 25. The righteousness of God is declared, for the remission of sins that are *past*, through the forbearance of God.

And when we read "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," the original is, he added

added to the church the *saved* of the Lord. And O! how happy and desirable a privilege is this, to be added to the church, and to be the saved of the Lord!—to be pardoned and accepted—to have righteousness imputed without works, because we have, as yet, no good works to be imputed. What sinner would not wish to be thus saved and indemnified from wrath; and have a standing in the grace and kingdom of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST?—To become a *child* of God, and an *heir* according to the hope of eternal life?—To have his person accepted in the sight of God our Savior, in this present time, and his works and virtues finally rewarded at the judgment of Jesus Christ?

How can the unhappy sinner be easy and contented to remain under condemnation and the wrath of God, without hope and without salvation, when the offers of the gospel are so favorable as those mentioned in the text, “That if he shall confess with his mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in his heart that God hath raised him from the dead, he shall be saved” as above-mentioned.

I would only just observe further again under this head, that the faith here required is always supposed to be *practical* and *sanctifying*—that the believer henceforth orders his conversation as becomes the gospel, and is to the praise of the glory of that grace wherein he is accepted in the Beloved. For was the professing christian to continue in his sins, the great design of the gospel would be frustrated. The end of pardoning, as as well as punishing, is reformation. Christ is not the minister of sin, his doctrines are all according to godliness, and the whole end of his constitution of grace, is to

to promote holiness, in order to happiness. The christian must consider, that although he has access to his present state of grace and favor, not by means of any prior virtue, or works of righteousness he has done, yet it is in order to his being zealous of good works, in time to come, and to his perfecting holiness in the fear of God. For he is now become a *disciple* of Jesus Christ, and has taken him for his Lord and Master, and is accountable to him, who has promised the crown of life to persevering virtue, and faithfulness to the death. And lo ! he comes quickly, and his reward is with him, to give to every one according as his work has been.

Into this happy state are all believers brought by embracing the gospel. So desirable a change does it make in the circumstances of poor sinners to confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and to believe in the heart that God hath raised him from the dead. You will permit me then, *my hearers*, in the

III, and last place, earnestly to urge and exhort you, not only to believe on the name of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, but to profess his holy religion, that you may be saved. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." To confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, is a thing too well understood, however there may be a little difference in manner and form, to stand in need of any further explanation.

But perhaps you will inquire more particularly concerning the FAITH of Christ, and what that believing on him is, that is so necessary to our *present* peace, and hope, and comfort, as well as our *future* eternal salvation. Let me tell you then, according to the text,
that

that faith is the work of the *heart*—it is to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—or in other words, that God hath raised him from the dead. The belief of Christ's resurrection, is, in effect, the belief of the whole doctrine of the gospel, and christian revelation, for the grand system of christianity depends upon this single, important fact. “If Christ be not raised, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins, under wrath and condemnation, and subject to eternal death.

But if Christ be risen from the dead, it follows that he is justified and accepted of the *Father*, who has done this honor to his well-beloved Son. It follows that he has conquered death and done away sin—that he will raise the dead and judge the world—that all power in heaven and earth is committed to him—that he has actually erected his constitution and kingdom of grace—has finished the work which God gave him to do—and consequently, that we may have hope towards God—may depend upon the grace of the gospel—are assured of pardon and acceptance upon repentance and faith in Jesus Christ—and upon eternal life, as the gift of God, in him to the final faithfulness of the saints, according to the tenor of the new-covenant. In short, it follows from the resurrection of Christ, that all the promises and declarations of the gospel are true and from God, and that our Lord has fully executed his commission, which he received from his Father, who has thus raised, exalted and glorified him. But of this great and fundamental FACT, we have all the evidence that the nature of the thing will admit of. Angels testified of his resurrection at the sepulchre, the same morning that he arose—he was seen of great numbers, and by chosen witnesses,

witnesses, who often conversed, and who eat with him after his resurrection, and saw him ascend into heaven, and a cloud received him out of their sight.

Moreover he sent down the Holy Ghost, according to his promise, and endued his disciples with power from on high—with the strange and sudden gift of all kinds of tongues, for propogating the gospel through the world, and with a power of working miracles equal to his own, which an impostor could not do.—And while he lived in the world, gave full proof of his mission from above, by the many, the benificent and amazing miracles he daily wrought. Various and incontestible are the arguments, by which the truth of the christian religion is confirmed. But I mean not now to enter upon any elaborate proof of this.

But it may be observed, that as a believing that God raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and so a believing the truths that are consequent from it and connected with it, is made essential to salvation, so this faith itself, is required of us with great fitness and propriety, and to serve the most necessary and valuable purposes. It is not *arbitrarily* required, and to answer no good and useful end, for we cannot be christians without it, either in principle or practice. Neither is it unreasonably required, and without proper evidence, and full matter of conviction laid before us. And accordingly, every man that would be thought a christian, should examine and look out for himself—should see with his own eyes, and so be able to give a reason of his faith, his particular persuasion, and hope in Christ. God has been pleased to lay this evidence before our eyes, that we might judge for ourselves, like reasonable creatures. But if an *implicit* faith, or
receiving

receiving our religion upon trust, and by tradition from our forefathers, was all that God expected of us, this evidence would be *needless*, and this abundant matter of conviction which the gospel lays before us, to induce our belief, would be *lost* and to no purpose. But God does nothing in vain. Neither does God, who is perfect reason, and truth itself, exact of us any thing that is impracticable and impossible. He has given us reason, and he expects that we should make use of it, and has leveled our duty to our capacities.

And although many have been the curious definitions, and perplexing distinctions concerning faith, that have rather darkened than enlightened the human mind, yet it may well be supposed that the faith of the gospel, is not any nice, intricate and mysterious matter, and difficult to be understood. For being necessary for all, necessary to their salvation, it must be easy to be comprehended by all—and indeed cannot be otherwise than a thing that is plain and open to common sense. It is true, sinful passions and prejudices may darken the understanding, and obstruct that divine light that is poured out upon the soul, but the fair and honest mind cannot well help seeing and feeling the force of gospel truth and evidence. The apostle indeed has said the very same thing that I do. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded their minds.”

With regard to the moral quality of this faith, so suitable, so reasonable, intelligible and necessary for all, it may be further observed, that it does not consist in theory, and a mere speculative assent to truth as such, where nothing but the understanding and head are concerned, for this only, makes no man either better or worse, or rather has nothing to do with the moral character at all. This therefore

therefore cannot be the thing intended. But seeing it is with the heart man believes, if he believes to any purpose in religious matters, comprehending the passions and affections, together with the hopes and fears, those two great handles of the soul to believe on Jesus Christ, and that God raised him from the dead, and exalted him at his own right hand, as a Prince and a Savior, is to believe on him, as Lord and King in Zion, as Head of the new and gracious dispensation, Savior and Judge of the world, and therefore implies the acknowledgment and adoration of him accordingly, even that we love and fear him, that we are subject to his authority, and conform to his institution—that we hope and trust in him as our Savior, and look for salvation through his name and mediation.

In a word, thus to believe on Christ, is to become his disciples and subjects. And by following his instructions, by attachment to his interest, and obedience of his laws, make manifest our loyalty and fidelity to him. This appears to be the true though comprehensive meaning of faith or believing on Christ, considered as the condition of salvation. And is there any great and mighty mystery in all this? And wherein does it surpass the weakest understanding? Who does not know what it is to acknowledge a civil sovereign, or military commander, and to be true and faithful to the government so acknowledged? What was it to believe on Moses and to be a Jew? Was it not to believe in him as God's messenger and vicerent—to become his disciple, subject to his authority and laws, and to look for the favor of God in the way of his institution? So to believe on Christ, and to be a christian, is to own him as the King of Israel, the Prophet God promised to send into the world,

like unto Moses, and therefore to revere his power, to trust in his grace and protection, and hope for salvation according to his gospel.

How very naturally was all this exprest, by the Pharisees, when they *tauntingly* said to the blind man who believed on Jesus, when he had restored his sight, "You are his disciple, say they, but *we* are Moses' disciples, we know God spake unto Moses, &c." The case was plain, to be the disciple of any one, supposed to be authorised and empowered by God, was the same as to believe on him; and so on the contrary, to believe on such a one, was to become his disciple. The faith of the gospel as it stands connected with salvation, is a *practical, moral* virtue. To believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, implies a character—they that have believed in God are careful to maintain good works—to lead godly lives as the grace of God teaches, and in this way to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior. Faith is an eminent, capital virtue, in the christian scheme and character, and is the gift of God, as every other virtue is—and every virtue is the gift of God, as every other blessing is, to be acquired in the common course of things, by diligent, earnest endeavors in a concurrence with the divine grace and providence. Very glorious is the gospel of the blessed God! very rich the grace of our divine Redeemer! shall we not receive, *my bearers*, the record that God has given us of his Son in the gospel? Shall we reject a revelation so well attested, despise such offers and tenders of mercy, turn away from him that speaketh to us from heaven, and neglect the great salvation? How many, alas! in every place, that do neither of the things mentioned in the text—who neither with the heart

heart believe unto righteousness, or with the mouth make confession unto salvation ! And then again, how many, who although they *believe* the gospel, yet make no public-profession of that faith ? But let me ask such, is not this putting asunder, what God has joined together, and that in order to salvation ? If you believe in your heart that God raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, why do you not also name his name, and confess him with your mouth, and become obedient and subject to him in all things ? Can you be willing that he should deny you before his Father, and the angels of God, because you thus implicitly and virtually deny him before men ?

A profession of the religion of Jesus Christ, as it is a duty, equally with believing on him, so it is necessary in order to *other* duties. If you have neglected to be baptized, it is necessary in order to that. And this, by the way, is a duty indispensibly required, and very solemnly enjoined. For it is observable, that as a *profession* is joined with faith in our text, so our Lord himself, joins *baptism* with it in another place, saying, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Let such as have not yet received that ordinance, arise therefore, and be baptized and wash away their sins.

But perhaps you have made a profession of religion, or confessed with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and have in consequence of it been baptized or brought your children to baptism, and so have attended and conformed to some of the institutions of Christ, in his gospel, all alike sacred, but have neglected some other equally obligatory upon you, and required by your profession. Perhaps, for instance, notwithstanding your faith and public profession of Christ and his holy religion,

religion, you have never been admitted as a member of any particular church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so have never attended at his table, and commemorated his death in the christian passover. But if you have professed thus only at *large*, as we may say, or *owned the covenant* as perhaps you may call it, give me leave to tell you plainly that you are yet *defective* and *partial* in your duty and obedience. I will not say you are so in your *profession*, for you have confessed Christ with your mouth the *same* as others. The covenant is the same—the same religion is professed by all—the same yoke is assumed by all—all are servants of the same Lord—all subject to the same laws, and all candidates for the same glory and immortality.

How then can you be justified in the neglect of any part of the christian service? But do you not offend in neglecting the holy communion, not only *occasionally*, but *habitually*, not for a time only, but from year to year? And moreover, as what is an aggravation, instead of an excuse of your neglect, was it not your deliberate intention, when you confess Christ before men, to live in this omission of duty, at least for a time, and therefore declined being formally admitted into any particular church, where the *Eucharist* is administered, and all the members obliged to attend? But does not such offending in one point, render you in a sense, guilty of all? Is it not, in a sort, despising and contemning the same sacred authority by which all Christ's laws are enacted? And will not your Lord and Master therefore resent such conduct, and account himself insulted and affronted by you? Is there not danger that he will blot your name out of the book of life? And is not this the language of a conduct like this?

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"I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and confess his name—I subject myself to his authority, and engage obedience to his commands, and hope for salvation by him, but yet I reserve to myself the liberty, at least, of omitting duty, in a case I think proper. I will comply with his requisitions in all things, except where, being my own judge, I think it better to do otherwise." Will such a submission be accepted by our great Master in heaven? What master or governor on earth would be pleased and satisfied with such a servant and subject? Will not our Lord bid such, finally, to depart from him, for he knows them not?

Let me then reason a little with such *half-way* professors, such partial disciples, such defective believers. What reasons can you assign for a conduct, so unreasonable, so inconsistent and offensive? I will suppose, *my good friends*, you have your excuses and objections to make—that you have your reasons to give, such as they are. For we are apt to find some apologies that will serve to satisfy our selves, in regard of our *own* behavior, even where it is censured and condemned by others, that are not partial and prejudiced as we are.

But come let us try and examine the strength and validity of these reasons and excuses. I can read men's hearts so far as to guess at some of them. Are you afraid of being tyed up to stricter rules of *living*, by coming to the table of the Lord? I am sorry to say it, yet I fear this may be supposed to be the case with some. I am aware that no individual will own it, in regard of himself, though he may think it true of others. It is however, a very serious matter, and ought to be duly attended to, as what our salvation, by Jesus Christ, stands connected with. It is certainly a very
bad

bad reason, and what we may well be ashamed of and unwilling to own, because we all very well know that the gospel indispensibly requires of all professors, a life of the strictest virtue and purity, even that such as name the name of Christ, should depart from all iniquity, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.

So that the profession you have already made of the christian religion, and the covenant you have entered into, though you have never approached the Lord's table, as duty required, yet binds you as strongly, as though you had attended *that* ordinance, as well as others. For the obligations of professing and baptized persons can be relaxed and dissolved only by renouncing that profession and baptism—nor indeed will this do, for the obligation lies upon us, *naturally* and *necessarily*, prior to our express entering into it. For our covenanting and professing religion, is nothing but a *voluntary* taking upon ourselves an obligation that existed before, and that we were previously and unavoidably under. Which, by the way, may serve to remind such as have made no profession of religion at all, that they are therefore not free and at liberty to sin with impunity, for they are by *nature* under bonds to God and virtue, from which nothing can discharge them, and therefore their neglecting to assume these bonds, is so far from *alleviating*, that it is an additional circumstance to their guilt and criminality.

Upon the whole, there is nothing more plain and certain than that such as wish to be released from their religious obligations, or are afraid of strengthening them, are not only not *fit*, but *far* from the kingdom of God—and if they have owned and acknowledged the christian faith, they are of the number of those who
having

having put their hand to the plough, look and draw back unto perdition. And it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment, delivered unto them. To such it is happened according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

But perhaps the aforementioned is not your case—but your reason is that you think yourself *unfit* for this holy ordinance—you sincerely wish to attend upon it, in obedience to Christ, and as he has commanded you—it is a grief and trouble to you to turn your back upon it, but it appears so solemn and sacred to you, that you dare not approach it, or at least not till you have made some further advancement in piety and goodness, and attained to some better assurance of your being a true believer and child of God.

This I believe is a much more common reason, and which many are willing enough to own. Such kind of conscientious scruples are supposed to be not only consistent with an honest, well-meaning mind, but to be rather an argument of religious tenderness and fear of offending. And the human heart is not ashamed of that which implies and carries in it the appearance of honesty and sincerity, and that is no disparagement to the moral character.—But charge it with insincerity and hypocrisy, and it will immediately shew the pride of resentment—and the reason of it is, the heart is conscious, that however excusable other things may be, yet deceit and falsehood originate from itself, and that to be *true* or *false*, as they imply *praise* or *blame*, so they are *both* at its own option.

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With regard to that part of the foregoing objection which is taken from *unfitness*, it may be observed, that it is certainly *fit*, at all times, that we should do our duty, and always *unfit* that we should neglect it. And let me ask, what is personal unfitness for duty, but want of heart, and an upright disposition to comply with it? And what is this heart and disposition but a real, genuine wish and desire to perform it?

But you say that "you sincerely wish to attend your duty, in obedience to Christ, and it is a grief to you to do otherwise." But can you wish to be sincere, and not be so? Truth and honesty, as just said, depend upon the heart itself—and for a treacherous, deceitful person to say that he wishes, in his heart to be sincere and honest, is altogether absurd, and seems not agreeable to common sense.

If what you say then is the truth, as we suppose it is, the character you give of yourself, instead of arguing any disqualification, is rather a proof of your fitness for the ordinance. God looks at the heart, and an honest mind, and desire to please him is the greatest recommendation in his sight. If you did not wish and heartily desire to obey Christ in all things, this would be an unfitness. But if you are honest and true—if you are conscious you mean well, and wish to serve Christ, according to the gospel, and to be a good christian, why should you not come to this ordinance of Christ, as well as others, in order to a further advancement in piety and goodness, and as a means of obtaining a more comfortable hope of your acceptance with God? Those serious and hearty desires of knowing and doing your duty, which you find within yourself, are the beginnings, at least, of goodness, and are not to be quenched, but improved.—They are doubtless from God, and the motions of his Holy Spirit. The foundation is laid on which
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to build the christian character, and for going on to perfection. If you felt none of these sacred wishes and devout desires, and had no heart or inclination to these things, as is the sad case with many, you would then have no need of such an address, as is now made to you. But you say it is otherwise, and in the same degree that you speak truly and honestly, you are not only obliged, but in a good measure qualified to be a guest at the table of the Lord.

What has been said, might be looked upon indeed, as a sufficient reply to the question under consideration.—But as there are some people more influenced and instructed by arguments taken from facts and things of outward appearance, than by an abstract way of reasoning, I shall give another kind of answer to the difficulty proposed.

But let it be here premised, that some misconception there certainly must be, either as to the nature and design of the thing, or his own character and obligations, in him, who with the mouth confesses the LORD JESUS, and yet lives in the neglect of this ordinance.

Suffer me, then, my friend and fellow-christian, to ask you, when you made a profession of christianity, or owned the covenant, as it is called, which is the same thing, did you not take Christ for your Lord and Master? Did you not freely subject yourself to his authority and commands, without reserve? And is not this one of his commands, that all his disciples and followers should meet at his table, and celebrate the christian feast in remembrance of him? And then further to increase the sense of your obligation, consider the noble end of this divine institution, and wherefore it is our Lord has required this—even because being the great Founder of our holy religion, he has, in some measure, like the founder's of some other institutions,

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appointed this sacred supper with a view to keep alive the memory of himself, and his benefactions, among christians, after his ascension into heaven, even unto the end of the world. And can you be willing that this benevolent intention of your once crucified, now exalted Redeemer should be frustrated?—That he should be forgotten, and his name perish from among men? And yet this must soon be the case through the world, should his churches fail, and his ordinances cease to be administered:—Which this unjustifiable, and too prevailing practice, has a direct tendency, in time to effect. But you say “it appears to be such a *sacred* and *solemn* ordinance, that you dare not approach it.” But did you embrace a religion that contained services too sacred to be attended upon? To be *sacred* is the property of religion—the more sacred, the better—every thing in religion is sacred.—Take away this, and it ceases to be religion.

But why is one christian ordinance and institution more sacred than another, enjoined by the same Lord, and the same authority? *Baptism* in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is equally sacred, whether administered to yourselves or to your children. And yet you feel no objection to the sacredness and solemnity of this—perhaps make too light and indifferent a matter of it. But if you are duly impressed with the *sacredness* of the thing, why have you not the same fearful apprehensions about receiving or attending upon *this* sacred ordinance, as the other? But then further, if the solemnity and sacredness of the thing is what makes you think yourself unfit for it, how dare you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and enter into solemn covenant, with
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God, in him ? If there is any one thing in religion more solemn and sacred than another, it must be this awful covenanting with a great and infinite God ! sinful dust and ashes, forming an holy contract with the all-perfect, tremendous Jehovah ! This is a thing, with all the solemnity of it, you have done already, without so much diffidence and hesitation.—But if you was fit and worthy to do this, you are undoubtedly as fit and worthy to remember Christ at his table.—After having so solemnly consecrated yourself to Christ in an everlasting covenant, surely you may be allowed to shew forth his death till he comes.

Certainly *now*, after all you have done, he will permit you to receive these pledges and assurances of his grace and love—will permit you to refresh and strengthen your heart with the bread of life and the water of life—will indulge you to renew your vows and ratify your former covenant and obligations, at his table—to rejoice in his goodness, and glorious exaltation, in the hope he has set before you, and the glory that is to be revealed in the saints hereafter.

For let it be remembered that these are some among others, of the valuable, happy purposes, for which he has instituted this sacred, delightful and useful feast. And can it be supposed that your kind and condescending Lord and Savior, who indulges you with a standing in the covenant of his grace, will deny you a place at his table ? I know it is very possible you may be unfit and unprepared for *both*, a place in his covenant, and a seat at his board. For many there are whom he will finally *disown*, that have both called him Lord, and have eaten and drank at his table.—But you see, I reason thus, if you thought yourself fit
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and qualified for the *one*, why should you doubt of your preparedness for the *other* ?

Must not this be evidently owing to some *undue*, some *superstitious* reverence and awe, which has no foundation in reason, that you have conceived for *this* ordinance above others ? And is there no way to account for this, in any measure ? Whence does this prejudice and misconception arise ? Some writers may have been imprudent and to blame in the representations they have given of this ordinance, as requiring a faith of *assurance*, the certain knowledge of the *particular* time of the person's conversion, with all the peculiar circumstances of it, answering to some supposed and prescribed *mode* and *form* of it, perhaps in great part of mere human imagination.—For the saving operations of the gospel, and the grace of God, upon the human mind are as different as those minds themselves, and the circumstances, tempers, conditions, educations and moral characters of mankind, which are infinitely various.

And why may it not be supposed, or at least queried, whether a certain *religious dread* may not have descended down, like some other things *hereditary* in human nature, from the dark and popish ages, relative to this sacred ordinance ?—Even from those times of ignorance and barbarism, when such a mystery began to be made of this sacrament, and it was held in such singular and stupid veneration, that the laity were not suffered to partake in both kinds of it ? But a small wafer only was carefully laid by the Priest upon the tongues of the communicants, lest any crumbs of Christ's body should by accident, profanely fall upon the ground.—And the cup was forbidden to be handed round to the common people,
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and was drank only by the Priests, lest a drop of Christ's *real* blood should fall from their lips—a sight, thought too shocking to be endured !

And thus it is in the church of Rome to this day—where the bread and the wine, after consecration, are supposed to be converted into the *real, literal* flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, called the *real Presence*. No wonder therefore, that a superstitious *horror*, so much encouraged and industriously kept up among them, should seize upon the common people, and be propagated from fathers to sons—nor perhaps that some relicks of it, should be found in some other churches, even to this day.

But we, *my bearers*, profess to entertain no such strange, dreadful ideas of the thing. Our blessed Lord is only *represented* by those outward symbols of his body and blood.—Those *visible* tokens serve to remind us of him who is *invisible*.—His death is shewed forth, and the *whole* wisely, admirably calculated to answer the great and excellent end proposed, viz. the calling to mind our absent Friend and Savior, and the great and marvellous things he has done and suffered for us—at the same time reminding us also of the obligations we lie under to love, and serve, and imitate *him*, as well as exercise benevolence to one another ; and all this in hope and joyful expectation of that future life and glorious immortality that is brought to light by the gospel.

And to conclude this head, what is there in all this that should fright christians, who are *Protestants*, and not ignorant, deluded *Papists*, from such an ordinance as this ? What more comfortable, more natural, reasonable and decent, than for christians to remember
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their *dear* and *adorable* Savior at his table? Indeed how can they be excused, when they believe on him, in their *hearts*, and have confessed him with their *mouths*? Or, in the next place, does that mistranslated text discourage you, 1 Cor. xi. 29. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." But this text rightly understood, however formidable it may appear, and sound dreadfully in the ears of the mere *English* reader, yet need discourage no serious and well-disposed person, or fright him away from the table of the Lord.

For look into the margin of your bibles, and you will find that what is translated DAMNATION in the text, is there rendered *judgment*, which is the true meaning of the original word, and is so rendered in other places. The same *Greek* word is used when it is said "*judgment* shall begin at the house of the Lord." And indeed the judgment here threatened, appears by the context not to mean eternal judgment, or damnation, for the judgments brought upon the *Corinthians* for their unworthiness, were of a *temporal* nature. For the apostle adds, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." And if we carefully read this chapter and attend to the disorderly manner in which they celebrated the Lord's supper, at that time, we shall not wonder at those judgments brought upon them—which, by the way were so far from being damnation to them, that in the next verses, the apostle says, "They were thus judged and chastened of the Lord, that they should not be condemned with the world," or subjected to eternal damnation.

See their misbehavior, as the apostle has related it, and which, in this letter, he accuses them with, to their faces ;

faces ; " one is hungry and another is drunken," at this sacred feast, and their charity-collation attending it, where all sobriety and decency was expected. He charges them with eating by themselves, and one before another—separating from the other brethren, and not holding proper communion together, in a friendly, charitable, christian-like way. In short they conducted this matter, " as not *discerning* the Lord's body," or not considering and attending to the religious design and intention of the ordinance, as being to shew forth the Lord's death, and exercise benevolence to one another.—But on the contrary, attended upon it rather as a *common feast*, and that too in a disorderly, confused and intemperate way—which are things to be reproved, although they too often happen, in the civil, social intercourses of men. Well might such behavior expose these unworthy receivers to the judgments of God.

Perhaps the scrupulous person, with whom we are now concerned, never entertained an idea like this, of eating and drinking unworthily.—But rather supposed that a serious, devout person, after examining himself, and studying the nature of the ordinance, and putting his heart into the best frame he was able, and attending with proper reverence, in obedience to Christ, might yet incur damnation for the well meant action of receiving the sacred elements :—And that too, on account of some *accidental* unpreparedness, or *critical* defect in the manner of his believing.

But such a supposition is more accommodated to the nice and punctilious nature of the law of Moses, than to the free and liberal spirit of the gospel. It seems unhappy that the terrifying word *Damnation*, is
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so wrongly made use of in this text. It is scarcely thus directly and *absolutely* announced any where in the whole book of God, against the most horrid and atrocious crimes that are committed among men.

And I make no doubt has been the means, through a misunderstanding, of keeping a long time, from their duty, many timorous, but otherwise serious, and truly religious persons. True it is, we ought carefully and conscientiously to guard against all kinds of disorderly and unworthy receiving.—But yet although it should so happen that we were justly chargeable with some unworthiness, in our attendance upon this ordinance, it exposes to damnation, without the benefit of repentance, no more than our unworthy performance of any other christian duty and service.

We may come to baptism—we may come to the house of God unworthily.—We may not keep our tool when we go there, or take proper heed how we hear when we are there, but yet we hope in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, to accept our serious and honest endeavors, notwithstanding our many infirmities and imperfections. When we go to our *knees* and our *devotions* in the best manner we can, there may be something unworthy in the temper of our minds, or manner of our performance, but do we kneel and pray damnation to ourselves thereby? God forbid! yet it cannot be denied that we do it *here*, as much as we eat and drink damnation to ourselves, at the table of the Lord, when we attend with reverence, in a *due* sense of our duty, and in obedience to his command.

Our comfort and happiness is that the gracious constitution of the Redeemer, accepts faithfulness and sincerity, without sinless perfection. The parable in the

the xxiid. chapter of Matthew, representing a man without a wedding-garment, at the feast made by a certain king for the marriage of his son, which guest, was ordered to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth, has been made a ground of objection, by some against coming to the table of the Lord, similar to the foregoing, fearing that they should be found there without this wedding-garment, and so be sentenced by the Lord of the feast to the same place of disgrace and punishment. It is true, many such there will be found in the great day of the marriage of the Lamb, thus unequipped and unprepared for the coming of their Lord.

The parable seems to be designed for a general representation of the gospel-state and kingdom. But to satisfy the scrupulous in this point, who may suppose it has special reference to this ordinance, it must be inquired, what is meant by this scripture figure and metaphor, a wedding-garment? And in reply to this, let it be observed, that at a noble feast and entertainment, where respectable personages are expected to be present, decency requires a dress and appearance, suitable to the occasion; so in like manner, in the moral view of the thing, a sacred, religious feast, such as that of the Lord's supper requires a habit and temper of mind, answerable to the nature and design of it. For in this case the above-mentioned dress and outward appearance, are nothing—all are welcome from the lanes, and highways, and hedges—the poor equally with the rich. The wedding-garment in this case, is a faith, profession and conversation agreeable to the gospel.

We cannot appear there in the robe of innocence—but we may come with a good mind, an honest intention, clothed with humility, meekness, patience,
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penitence, our loins girt about with truth, free from guile, fraud, and sinister, unworthy views.—If we come indulging hypocrisy and deceit in our hearts, we may expect to be unwelcome guests.—But if we come repenting, reforming, devoting ourselves to God in Jesus Christ, and hungering, and thirsting after righteousness, we cannot be repulsed.—“The hungry are filled with good things, while the rich and the full are sent empty away.” This virtuous character—this devout temper—this habitual, sincere disposition to serve God, and discharge our duty, is indeed the *white linen*—the cloathing and righteousness of the saints. And what hinders the serious and good, the honest, and well-meaning christian, from appearing at the gospel-feast in this habit and dress? Yea why should he absent himself? You are invited to come. And by such reasoning and perswasion, we must compel you to come in. “The Spirit and the Bride or Church, say come, and whosoever will may come, and take of the water of life freely.” Let it not be said, O Lord! that it hath been done by thy servants, as thou the great Master of the feast hast commanded, and yet there is room, and thy table is not filled!

But are there some that further object, and endeavor to justify themselves by saying, there are those in the church of Christ, whose characters are not so good as many that are without, and who promise more than they perform. Yet this surely is no sufficient plea and excuse for the neglect of our *own* duty. We must each of us be answerable for himself, not for others. Allowing the observation to be true, above-mentioned, nevertheless we are told that the tares and the wheat must grow together until the harvest. The good

good fish and the bad are not separated till the end of the world. There will be always some such, as cry Lord, Lord, but do not the things that their Lord says.—And others, who delay a compliance with their duty, too long, of whom better things, from a view of their characters, might justly be expected.

Yet matters of open scandal, orderly complained of, and duly supported, the Church of Christ is supposed to attend to, and putrid, corrupt members to be cut off from it. And by belonging to the church of Christ ourselves, we may correct abuses in others.

In a word, perhaps there may be some, especially such as are young, or of a diffident make, that wish to number themselves among Christ's people, and attend the orders of his house, but are kept back by a certain reluctance they feel in making known their desire, or attracting the public eye and notice in this solemn transaction.—They may be fearful of exposing their ignorance or failing, in their manner of address, when manifesting their intention to the Pastor, or the like.

But *my good hearers*, whether older or younger, let nothing of this kind be a discouragement or hindrance to you in complying with your plain and known duty. We mean to be easy of access—we rejoice to see this disposition in you—are ready to meet and assist you, and know how to make all proper allowances for you. The thing we *wish* is to see you willing to forsake your sins—to embrace the gospel, and in some way give your public and hearty consent to the christian covenant. But the difficulty above-mentioned, is supposed to be chiefly superseded and removed with regard to all such as have already made a profession, in order to baptism for themselves, or their children.

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And as to all others, let me beseech them not to be influenced by such *little* considerations, so as to put off, from year to year, a duty of such importance. The thing may be soon out of your power.—I have known many in the course of my ministry, that have sadly lamented it when it was too late. And not only so, but it behoves a christian to be a person of more courage and resolution than this—more above that fear of man that bringeth a snare. They that confess Christ before men, must be able to *suffer* for his name—and not even fear them that *kill* the body.—We should so fear God, above all, as not to offend him, or omit, on any consideration whatsoever, a duty, he has so plainly, and so solemnly required, at our hands.

And what shall I add more? I have now fully discharged myself with regard to this great point, and given ease to my own mind.—Whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, this is the message that is brought to you from the Lord. And Oh! that it might please him to give it success, and follow it with his blessing.—That his thin and diminished churches might be increased, and his people be seen flocking to his ordinances as doves to their windows..

Consider what you have heard—reconsider it, and weigh it well, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

AMEN and AMEN.

